

HITCHIN URBAN DISTRICT COUNCIL.

Report of the Medical Officer of Health for 1919.

To the Chairman and Members of the Council.

GENTLEMEN,—

The report this year as advised by the Ministry of Health will be a short summary of the health and sanitary conditions prevailing in the town.

POPULATION.

At the census of 1911 this was 11,905. The civilian population is now estimated to be 12,181, and the total population to be 12,689.

PHYSICAL FEATURES.

Hitchin stands at an average height of about 220 ft. above sea-level, surrounded by hills on the East, South and West, and by flat country on the North. The sub-soil is mostly chalk and gravel, with clay towards the North. A spur of the Chiltern Hills bounds the South-East side of the town.

The roads are mostly constructed of tar mac. There are three open commons, Walsworth on the East, Butt's Close in the centre of the town, and Oughton Head Common on the North-West. An open pasture (Windmill Hill) of 2½ acres has recently been given to the town by the Seeböhm family.

SOCIAL CONDITIONS.

Hitchin is the market town for a considerable area around, and its population is made up of residential, professional, trades and industrial elements. The industries of the town comprise fellmongering, iron works (2), jam and sweet factories, lavender production, railway depôt, agricultural engineering, and boiler-making works. Many who live in Hitchin work in Letchworth. There are two cinemas, clubs and two Town Halls, where dances, concerts, etc., are held. There are five elementary and two secondary schools, besides private ones.

VITAL STATISTICS.

The following are the figures for the town compared with those for England and Wales:—

	Hitchin.	England and Wales.
Death rate per 1,000 population ...	14.5	13.8
Birth rate per 1,000 population ...	17.4	18.5
Infant mortality per 1,000 births ...	63.3	89.

There were 95 cases of notifiable disease. Pulmonary tuberculosis was responsible for 12 deaths, whooping cough for 7 deaths, influenza for 8 deaths, pneumonia for 10 deaths, and malignant disease 21 deaths. There were 9 deaths from violence. The deaths from whooping cough show what a fatal disease this is in young children, and suggest that it is too lightly regarded by those who nurse it. There was only one death from diphtheria, one from measles, and none from scarlet fever.

There were 14 deaths of infants under one year. Of these 4 were illegitimate children, and as there were 21 illegitimate children born, the proportion who died is very high. On analysis it appears that 7 out of these 14 deaths were unpreventable, and 6 of the others died of catarrhal diseases. As compared with last year's figure of 50, the infant mortality figure has slightly increased. The satisfactory feature of the statistics is that there is increased birth-rate from 15.8 to 17.4.

WATER SUPPLY.

An ample supply of good water is obtained from a deep well in the chalk, on the Council's freehold land at Charlton. This is on the south, and surrounded by pasture land. A syphonic main brings the water to the pumping station in Queen-street, whence it is pumped up to the Water Tower on Windmill-hill. The height of this is 370 ft. above sea level. The average daily consumption is 270,000 gallons. The number of gallons pumped during the year was 106,768,618, being 9,196,941 less than in 1918.

RIVERS AND STREAMS.

Three streams, the Hiz, the Purwell, and the Oughton, have their rise in the southern side of the district. They all join near the northern boundary into one stream, there is little pollution and the mud is cleared out periodically.

DRAINAGE.

There is a separate system of drainage, as the storm-water is caught on the road surfaces and fronts of houses and in gullies, and directed by pipes to the river at various points. The sewage system is water borne, and directed by sewers of ample size to the sewage disposal works situated on the north-east side of the district. The sewers are ventilated by 6-inch steel columns at various points, and are systematically flushed.

SEWAGE DISPOSAL.

There are two gravitation systems employed—a low-level and a high-level system. The low-level sewage is purified by passing through detritus tanks, screening chamber, septic tank and coarse and fine contact beds.

Storm overflow is received in another septic tank, which can be emptied out to the fine contact beds as required.

The high-level sewage is dealt with in detritus tanks, screening chambers, and four open subsidence tanks, from which the effluent flows to four circular clinker filters, being distributed by Adams' revolving sprinklers. After passing through these, it is again caught in a tank between the filters, from which it flows over an aerating wall into the effluent ditch. Here it joins the low-level effluent, passes under the River Hiz and empties itself into the river near Ickleford.

Ample tankage is provided for the storm overflow, which is drawn off on to filters as opportunity arises. The sludge from the different tanks is drawn off when necessary and filtered. The air-dried sludge is then collected and mixed with street refuse and solids from off the screens, and there is a good demand for the manure from farmers and gardeners.

The tanks, filters and buildings, etc., occupy 8 acres, leaving 12 acres for farming purposes, and as no sewage matter is applied to this land, the Surveyor is able to grow produce such as early potatoes, greenstuffs, etc. About 1½ acres are willow trees being grown for cricket bats, artificial limbs, etc.

CLOSET ACCOMMODATION.

Water closets are in general use, but many of them are unfortunately not supplied with a flushing cistern. At Charlton a pail system still exists in some houses. These are emptied regularly.

SCAVENGING.

The house refuse is collected from every house weekly, and sanitary galvanised iron dust-bins are in general use. If householders brought their receptacles to

the front of the house at a stated time when they knew the collection was to be made, the cost might be considerably reduced.

SANITARY INSPECTION.

Houses inspected ...	450.
Houses re-inspected ...	232.
Other premises inspected ...	21.
Schools inspected ...	8.
Trade premises visited ...	834.
Markets ...	2.
Houses cleansed, etc. ...	4.
Drainage repairs ...	63.
Water—house connections ...	8.
Yards repaired ...	10.
Nuisances abated ...	14.
Trade premises cleansed ...	25.

FOOD INSPECTIONS.

Carcases inspected ...	269.
Animals improperly kept ...	9.

Condemned.

Bacon ...	4½ tons.
Meat (chiefly tuberculous) ...	3 tons.
Dates ...	2 cwt.
Cheese ...	½ cwt.
Dried haddocks ...	3 boxes.
Rabbits ...	48.

SLAUGHTER-HOUSES.

There are 10 of these in Hitchin, and they have been regularly inspected, but experience tends to show that it is impossible to guarantee meat free from disease and fit for food unless inspection is carried on in a public abattoir, where everything is open and easy of access. Private abattoirs, too, are apt to be a nuisance, especially if they are among dwelling-houses, and their abolition would certainly improve the public health.

HOUSING.

Number of occupied dwellings	2,800.
Number unoccupied (unfit) ...	3.
Other buildings	175.

The demand for houses is very great, and the Council has decided to at once proceed with schemes for 76 houses in Bethel-lane and 240 houses at St. Michael's Mount. Until these houses are built nothing can really be done to improve the housing conditions, which in some parts of the town are very poor.

SCHOOLS.

There were 455 children examined in the Schools, and the commonest defects found were as follows:—

Unclean ...	16.
Malnutrition ...	6.
Teeth ...	24.
Tonsils and adenoids ...	38.
Eyes ...	20.
Unvaccinated ...	209.

Many single other defects were found.

The cleanliness of the children and the number treated and defects removed showed a great improvement. This reflects credit upon the health visitor, and must be encouraging to her.

The presence of small-pox in the county ought to warn parents of the risk they run in not having children vaccinated. Before the days of vaccination, small-pox was a very fatal disease of childhood, and yet here we have nearly half the children examined found to be unvaccinated!

In conclusion, I beg to thank the Inspector for his assistance during the year.

I remain,

Yours faithfully,

NORMAN MACFADYEN.

